

Elk Feedgrounds: A Challenge We Can Take On

Phase II Collaborative Process



Initial Public Meetings Summary: August 2021



Introduction

To initiate Phase II of the *“Elk Feedgrounds: A Challenge We Can Take On”* Collaborative Process, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD, or Department) Steering Team held a series of six initial public meetings in late July and early August 2021. These meetings had a three-fold purpose:

1. Share a brief recap of Phase I and the detailed timeline for Phase II.
2. Inform members of the public how to become involved as stakeholders in Phase II.
3. Engage in discussion with meeting attendees on their primary concerns and ideal outcomes related to elk feedground management.

This report summarizes the information shared and input received at the six Phase II initial public meetings. Additional details on this process can be found at <http://wgfd.wyo.gov/feedgrounds>

Phase II Collaborative Process Overview

Steering Team Members

The Phase II Steering Team is led by Scott Edberg, Wildlife Division Deputy Chief, and includes the following Department personnel:

- Dr. Sam Allen, Wildlife Veterinarian
- Ray Bredehoft, Habitat and Access Branch Supervisor
- Hank Edwards, Wildlife Health Lab Supervisor
- Mark Gocke, Jackson-Pinedale Public Information Specialist
- Gary Hornberger, Feedgrounds Supervisor
- Brad Hovinga, Jackson Region Wildlife Supervisor
- Dave Hyde, Feedgrounds Manager
- Jordan Kraft, South Pinedale Game Warden
- John Lund, Pinedale Region Wildlife Supervisor
- Janet Milek, Casper Public Information Specialist
- Brandon Scurlock, Pinedale Region Wildlife Management Coordinator
- Ben Wise, Jackson Region Wildlife Disease Specialist

Federal partners involved in Phase II include:

- Frank Durbian and Eric Cole, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service - National Elk Refuge
- Douglas (Gus) Smith, National Park Service - Grand Teton National Park
- Mark Thonhoff, Bureau of Land Management - Pinedale Resource District
- Jim Wilder, United States Forest Service - Bridger Teton National Forest

Tara Kuipers of Tara Kuipers Consulting is serving as a process facilitator to assist with Phase II.

Phase II Goals

The goal of the Elk Feedgrounds Collaborative Process is to consider all biological, social, economic, and political issues, along with wildlife diseases, to achieve a durable, publicly-supported long-term feedgrounds management plan for the 22 Department-operated elk feedgrounds.

The goal of Phase II of the Elk Feedgrounds Collaborative Process is to generate new, creative ideas regarding elk management that continue to allow the Department to meet its primary objectives of wildlife management, disease management and mitigation, hunter opportunity, habitat protection, and elk damage and conflict mitigation.

Phase II Initial Public Meetings

Meeting Schedule and Locations

Six initial public meetings were held across Wyoming at the following dates and locations. All meetings began at 6:00 pm and lasted approximately one hour.

- Tuesday, July 27, 2021: Wyoming Game & Fish Laramie Region Office, Laramie, WY
- Wednesday, July 28, 2021: Rock Springs Public Library, Rock Springs, WY
- Thursday, July 29, 2021: Wyoming Game & Fish Casper Region Office, Casper, WY
- Tuesday, August 3, 2021: Afton Community Center, Afton, WY
- Wednesday, August 4, 2021: Sublette County Weed and Pest Office, Pinedale, WY
- Thursday, August 5, 2021: Jackson Hole Conference Center, Jackson, WY

Communications and Outreach

The Department engaged in various public outreach efforts to build awareness of and invite involvement in the six Phase II initial public meetings. This included a news release on May 10, 2021 and a second release on July 12, 2021 that went out to all media outlets in the state. Direct emails were sent to Phase I participants and all elk special management stamp holders. In the week prior to the public meetings Game and Fish notifications were distributed via television and radio PSAs and social media posts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Meeting Agenda and Discussion

Each meeting followed the same agenda, outlined below:

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Brief Overview of Phase I
3. Phase II Timeline and Expectations
4. How To Get Involved in Phase II
5. Discussion
6. Wrap-Up and Adjourn

One of three Steering Team members led each of the six meetings: Scott Edberg (Laramie and Casper), John Lund (Rock Springs and Pinedale), and Brad Hovinga (Afton and Jackson). Tara Kuipers led the discussion portion of the meeting, and various steering team members aided the sessions by responding to questions and recording discussion notes.

A copy of the presentation used in the Phase II initial public meetings is found in Appendix A.

Phase II Participation and Discussion Summaries

A goal of the initial public meetings was to discuss with meeting attendees their primary concerns and ideal outcomes related to the Department's future feedground management. The same two discussion questions were used at each of the public meetings. The two questions and a summary of the responses gathered at each of the six meetings are below.

1. What are your 1 or 2 most important concerns about elk feedgrounds in Wyoming?
2. Taking into consideration this complex issue (e.g., agricultural interests, economics and tourism, hunting, wildlife health and disease, etc.), how would you describe your 'ideal outcome' for the future of elk feedgrounds in Wyoming?

TUESDAY, JULY 27, 2021: LARAMIE, WY 13 attendees	
QUESTION 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) • No place for elk to winter if feedgrounds go away • Brucellosis transmission to cattle when elk are off feedgrounds • Other diseases that impact elk on feedgrounds (scabies, etc.) • Congregating animals and density of elk on feedgrounds as a disease risk • Artificial intervention to elk habits and behaviors 	QUESTION 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native winter range is prioritized and converted back to habitat for elk whenever possible • Focus on what's best for elk • Keep economic benefits while decreasing co-mingling and disease risk, and keep population levels stable • Ensure both short- and long-term plans are being developed • Healthy businesses and economic impacts (especially hunting) • Elk are wild, healthy, and free-ranging around the state • All voices are heard
WEDNESDAY, JULY 28, 2021: ROCK SPRINGS, WY 4 attendees	
QUESTION 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in elk herd characteristics and their use of private • Rising development in certain areas (Green River Lakes, Black Butte areas) • Regardless of what happens, elk are herding animals and will congregate, and return to feedgrounds because of their history and behavior patterns • WGFD has the knowledge to manage feedgrounds, so any decision-making by federal agencies, lawsuits, general public, etc. are a concern • Changes at the National Elk Refuge (NER) could 'trickle down' to WGFD feedgrounds 	QUESTION 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedground management and decisions remain in the hands of WGFD • Continue to adapt and change • More space to improve or expand elk habitat to decrease disease 'hot spots' • Improve migration corridors to provide more movement and reduced congregation

THURSDAY, JULY 29, 2021: CASPER, WY 9 attendees	
QUESTION 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWD • Brucellosis • Hunting Opportunity • Decreasing winter kill and increasing elk survival over winter • Conflict issues with landowners (e.g., hay, fencing, etc.) • Traffic safety issues 	QUESTION 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change • Robust disease management (include addressing big horn sheep diseases) • Increase and/or enhance native winter range for elk • Pursue the state's purchase of private lands for additional elk winter range
TUESDAY, AUGUST 3, 2021: AFTON, WY 12 attendees	
QUESTION 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWD impacts, particularly 'close to home' on nearby feedgrounds • Maintain elk numbers and hunter opportunities made possible by feedgrounds • Impact on other species' winter range (e.g., mule deer) if elk are not fed • The support (or lack thereof) among WGFD staff for feedgrounds • A need for modeling efforts around CWD and other diseases • Need for a proactive approach • Using feedgrounds to treat disease in one area or location (versus elk dispersing) • Impact of private lands if changes are made to feedgrounds • Feedgrounds on public land, and the impacts if federal agencies require closure • The need for long-term control by feedgrounds by WGFD 	QUESTION 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The opportunity to be successful and have the 'best of' all options, which will take education and lots of work • Flexibility to adapt as things change • WGFD makes decisions on elk feedgrounds, not the courts or federal agencies • Feedground management is in balance with all other factors and interests • Allow for emergency feeding • Feeding that is spread out versus gathering elk in large herds
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2021: PINEDALE, WY 26 attendees	
QUESTION 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disease control and mitigation • Agriculture damage/conflict • Impacts of competition with other wildlife (e.g., mule deer) • Population management objectives; maintain healthy elk populations • Livestock disease concerns • Economic impacts to local communities (e.g., hunting, outfitting, non-consumptive users) 	QUESTION 2: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue current feedgrounds program, continue to address complexities, and be proactive to acquire private ownership of lands for elk feeding • Private land acquisition to eliminate political vulnerabilities and provide more stability in the feedgrounds program • Management that balances elk population and disease mitigation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat impacts and risk of degradation, particularly riparian areas • Federal land management and habitat protection/management decisions that could impact feedgrounds • Strategies to address development (specifically residential) impacts and habitat loss • Being proactive with contingency plans • Political support of management decisions related to feedgrounds • Changing perspectives and opinions on feedgrounds through education • Impact to predators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put feedground funding into more proactive solutions • Monitor the continued changes in politics around predators • Continue the 100+ year track record of providing habitat by the bale • Find consensus opportunities that address all of the key management concerns • Broad education that engages all publics • Maintain and expand an active, robust disease testing program
THURSDAY, AUGUST 5, 2021: JACKSON, WY 29 attendees	
<p>QUESTION 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elk population levels and population health • Ecosystem biodiversity • Winter range availability • Hunter opportunity, now and into the future • Conflict and damage on private lands • The need for a healthy paradigm for elk management • Ensuring decisions can be revisited when/if things change (e.g., adaptability) • Migration and relationship to elk use of feedgrounds • Ensure an established role of research and science in decision-making • Lack of movement or inactivity by management agencies to address risk • Diseases (CWD, Brucellosis) and their spread both on and off feedgrounds 	<p>QUESTION 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solutions are kept local with feedground decisions made in Wyoming • A management plan that is a flexible, adaptable “living document” • Management that is variable depending on conditions (e.g., light versus heavy winter) • Must include NER in all aspects of WGFD feedground management • Factor in human impacts, e.g., traffic, development, etc. • Using hunters to help train elk • A 3-way balance of natural dispersion and free-ranging elk populations; healthy elk with low disease concerns; and limited conflicts with private landowners • Resources currently put toward conflict and damage are repurposed for more proactive use • Utilize feedgrounds and this process as a research opportunity; partner with academia to improve science and knowledge for others • Minimize negative impacts to community economics and businesses • Keep federal partners as major contributors

Phase II Next Steps

Phase II was designed to recap Phase I and share detailed information on Phase II of the collaborative process, inform members of the public how to become involved as stakeholders in Phase II, and engage in discussions with meeting attendees. The Steering Team is now involved in two primary next steps: identifying stakeholder focus group members and planning for shared learning.

Stakeholder Focus Groups


Phase II initial public meetings outlined the role of the Stakeholder Focus Groups being formed to provide in-depth input to the Steering Team. At each meeting, individuals who are able and willing to commit to being a Phase II Stakeholder were invited to submit an interest form. These forms are being reviewed by the Steering Team and will be finalized by the Director's Office.

Shared Learning

Phase II will allow the Steering Team and the selected stakeholder focus group members to engage in several weeks of shared learning. Shared learning will focus on a variety of topics relevant to the future of feedground management, including the social and political pressures around elk feedgrounds, CWD and other wildlife diseases relevant to elk feedgrounds, winter range and land use on private and public lands, economic and tourism-related impacts, and the trade-offs and implications of elk feedground management.

Based on input collected in Phase I and II thus far, Steering Team members are identifying and compiling relevant, current information to address the shared learning needs. Shared learning is expected to kickoff for all stakeholder groups in early November 2021.

Appendix A: Phase II Initial Public Meeting Presentation




Elk Feedgrounds: A Challenge We Can Take On

Phase II

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Tonight's Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- Phase I Review
- Overview of Phase II
- How To Get Involved in Phase II
- Breakout Discussions
- Wrap-Up and Adjourn

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WYOMING GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

Dr. Sam Allen, Wildlife Veterinarian
 Ray Bredehoff, Habitat and Access Branch Supervisor
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 Brandon Scurlock, Pinedale Region Wildlife Management Coordinator
 Ben Wise, Jackson Region Wildlife Disease Specialist



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Douglas 'Gus' Smith
Grand Teton National Park



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Frank Durbian and Eric Cole
National Elk Refuge



U.S. FOREST SERVICE

James Wilder,
Bridger Teton National Forest



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Mark Thonhoff,
Pinedale Resource District

FACILITATOR: Tara Kuipers

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Elk Feedgrounds: A Challenge We Can Take On

The goal of the Elk Feedgrounds Collaborative Process is to consider all **biological, social, economic and political** issues, along with **wildlife diseases**, to achieve a durable, publicly-supported long-term feedgrounds management plan for the 22 Game and Fish-operated elk feedgrounds.

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Elk Feedgrounds: A Challenge We Can Take On

Phase I

Nov. 2020 to March 2021

- Virtual Public Meetings
- Answering Questions and Clarifying Facts
- Gathering Information Needed for Phase II

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Phase II

March 2021 to May 2023

- Public Meetings
- Stakeholder Focus Groups
- Shared Learning
- Stakeholder Focus Groups
- Draft Plan Development
- Public Meetings for Plan Review/Input
- Finalize and seek plan approval by WGF Commission

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Phase III

May 2023 and Beyond

- Feedground-specific implementation
- Accountability

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Phase I Review

Phase I focused on:

- The history and complexities of feeding elk
- How feeding has evolved over the years
- An overview of diseases impacting elk feedground
- Answering questions and receiving feedback on how to proceed with Phase II

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Phase I Meeting Recording and Summary

wgfd.wyo.gov/feedgrounds

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Overview of Phase II

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Phase II Purpose

- The goal of Phase II is to generate new, creative ideas regarding elk management that continue to allow the Department to meet its primary objectives of:
 - wildlife management
 - disease management and mitigation
 - hunter opportunity
 - habitat protection, and
 - elk damage and conflict mitigation.
- The Department will consider all options regarding future feedground management, and options will be weighed against all of these primary objectives.

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Phase II Timeline

TIMELINE	PHASE II STEP
March-June 2021	Step 1: Phase II Planning
June 2021-January 2022	Step 2: Public Meetings, Stakeholder Focus Groups Input and Shared Learning
January 2022-June 2022	Step 3: Draft Feedground Management Plan
June 2022- December 2022	Step 4: Stakeholder Focus Group Input and Public Meetings to Review, Comment on Draft Plan
December 2022- March 2023	Step 5: Consider Comments, Revise and Finalize Plan
March 2023-May 2023	Step 6: Submit Plan to WGF Commission for Approval
June 2023 onward (end Phase II, begin Phase III)	Step 7: Implementation And Accountability

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Phase II Initial Public Meetings

July 27 - Laramie
 July 28 - Rock Springs
 July 29 - Casper
 Aug 3 - Afton
 Aug 4 - Pinedale
 Aug 5 - Jackson

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Phase II Stakeholder Focus Groups

- Political/Government Officials
- Landowners & Agriculture Producers
- NGOs
- Sportspersons
- Outfitters & Guides
- General Public/Other
- Science & Academia

10-12 people in each group

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Phase II Stakeholder Focus Group Commitments

Round 1 Focus Group: Fall 2021

Initial Focus Group Input Session (approx. 2 hours)

Shared Learning: Fall & Winter 2021

*Approximately 12 weeks, 2-3 hours/week, Various topics
Combination of on your own, on-line, and in-person*

Round 2 Focus Group: Winter 2021 / Early Spring 2022

Second Focus Group Input Session (approx. 2 hours)

Round 3 Focus Group: Summer / Fall 2022

Review and Provide Input on Draft Plan (approx. 2 hours)

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Phase II Shared Learning Topics

- Politics and Social Pressures
- Damage and Conflict
- Winter Range and Land Use (Private & Public Land)
- Other States Management & Policy
- Impact to Elk Populations & Hunting Impacts To Other Wildlife
- CWD and Other Wildlife Diseases
- Economic & Tourism-Related Impacts
- Federal Partners
- Management Trade-offs & Implications
- Final Q&A

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Phase II Stakeholders

We hope all stakeholders will:

- Have a strong desire to learn new, in-depth information about this issue.
- Think creatively and critically about all of the complexities of elk feedgrounds.
- Respectfully consider new information and other viewpoints.
- Remain committed to this process for the long-term (approximately 18-24 months.)

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HB 101/House Enrolled Act 52

Effective July 1, 2021

Wyoming Statute 23-1-305

Closure of elk feedgrounds; alternative feeding sites; reporting requirements

- Requires that any permanent elk feedground closure by the Commission will require an order by the Governor
- Commission shall consult with the Wyoming Livestock Board on recommended elk feedground closure
- At least 1 public meeting in area where elk feedground closure would occur
- Commission is authorized to contract/lease private lands for feedgrounds for purpose of relocating feedgrounds which could be closed
- Does not prevent the Department from operating current elk feedgrounds, start/ending feeding dates, and emergency elk feeding operations
- Outlines the steps that the Department or Commissions would already do regarding any feedground closure
- **Will not impact management plan development and the public collaborative process**

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How to Get Involved in Phase II

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- Provide your name and email if you want to receive updates on future meetings
- Check the Department website for meeting summaries, updates on future meetings, and other information: wgfd.wyo.gov/feedgrounds
- **If you are able and willing to commit, sign up to be part of a Stakeholder Focus Group.** Complete and return the form by Aug 9 at 5 pm. *Groups will be finalized following all public meetings, and approved by the WGFD Director's Office.*

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Discussions

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What are your 1 or 2 most important concerns about elk feedgrounds in Wyoming?

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Taking into consideration this complex issue
(e.g., agricultural interests, economics, tourism, hunting, wildlife health and disease, etc.)
how would you describe your 'ideal outcome' for the future of elk feedgrounds in Wyoming?

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Wrap-Up

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- Provide your name and email if you want to receive updates on future meetings
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- **If you are able and willing to commit, sign up to be part of a Stakeholder Focus Group.** Complete and return the form by Aug 9 at 5 pm. *Groups will be finalized following all public meetings, and approved by the WGFD Director's Office.*

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